



Cross-Cultural Communication

Stephen Hsieh, Tur-Ya-Kar Elementary and Junior High School

It's an honor to participate this program with English teachers from New Taipei City. Though I've been to the US when I was young, it's the first time that I got so many chances to visit different schools in New York. During this training period, I experienced American culture that I might not learn from textbooks. In addition, I've learned new teaching skills and tips especially how American teachers build up positive learning atmosphere and develop global-wide surroundings from classroom observations. In the following part, I would like to present my observation and learning in the US. This report will be divided into three parts. The first part is my reflection about curriculum in these schools; the second is my observation toward signs and decorations in the campus; and the third is the overall surroundings in the US.

Reflection About Curriculum

During this training period, I visited seven schools at least, such as Centreville Elementary School, Greenbriar East Elementary School, Cub Run Elementary School, Park Avenue Elementary School, Freehold High School, Village Community School, and PS 173Q School etc. Some schools provide multiple language clubs and some even have dual language classes which all make a school like a global village.

For language clubs, students can choose what they are interested in or what language their parents speak. That's because more and more immigrants who speak different languages in the US. While they settled down and gave birth to the following generations, America became as diverse as countries around the world. Therefore, these new generations need to know not only English but also their mother languages or even more. In addition, some schools provide English training courses for students' parents who may be immigrant workers. These parents help them become accustomed to everyday American life by enhancing their language proficiency. So these parents can help their kids improve academic performance. Likewise, some schools make good use of students' cultural background. That is, some of their parents will be invited to do culture sharing to each class or even in school event. For instance, Korean Americans introduce how to make kimchi; Japanese Americans introduce how to wear kimono; Chinese Americans introduce traditional festivals like Lunar New Year; and Spanish Americans introduce folk dance and so on. No matter what languages are spoken, students are all exposed to different culture stimuli, in which makes the world small and cultivates their sense of world view.

For dual language classes, students will be taught intensively in a bilingual surrounding. Take PS 173Q School for example, a dual class is composed of up to 70% of higher leveled students and 30% of new comers. In this kind of class, all subjects are taught in English on



Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and in Chinese on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Usually, there are at least two homeroom teachers in each class. In some cases, there could be more if there are students who need special aids. Both Chinese and English teachers need to cooperate with each other in teaching and designing lesson plans for the same class. In dual class, language is not a subject but a tool. Students learn different subjects like Geography, History, Science, and Arts through meaningful contents. Especially in Math, English teacher teaches Chapter 1.1, and on the second day, Chinese teacher teaches the following Chapter 1.2. The reason why students need to learn in English previously is that students need basic learning background knowledge to facilitate their learning. In that case, they will think both in Chinese and English so that the dual-language lessons could be successful. If there are slow learners, computer assistance plays an important role while other classmates are doing higher leveled projects. Also, individual instruction is given to each student by terms. However, I found that most of the slow learners are new comers and they are under a lot of pressure not only because of school lessons behind but also mocking by classmates. Fortunately, on Chinese day, they became more confident for they are used to the language, and it's the time for them to keep pace with each other and get refreshed in study as well as in self-esteem. At first I wondered if it's a good way for students to learn. After the two days of classroom observation and statistics shown from school survey, I know it ought to be a stimulus like a shot in the arm, because students are eventually doing well or even better than those who are not receiving dual curriculum.

In comparison with my school curriculum, some are quite the same and all do good for students whereas some still need to be improved. For instance, both in TYK (Tur-Ya-Kar Elementary and Junior High School) and the US, we do have pen pals for each class. In the beginning, each student needs to write 2-4 postcards a year to his or her friend around the world. And if they are getting older, postcards could be shifted to letters, in that students practice their reading and writing literacy challengingly. And then, my students communicate with their pen pals through web cam like e-pals, they may try to make every word orally not just in written form by long-distance communication. Last but not the least, we do have students travelled abroad to visit their friends around the world, under that kind of circumstances, students have to face to face and communicate without any rehearsal because it's "live". And It serves a good way to make a thorough study of English as well as

cultures in different countries, so that students not only make an eternal friendship but also have open-minded view of cross-cultural communication.

However, in some specific lessons, we are still far behind the US, especially in world-wide awareness. In the US, the world map which shows different continents and oceans is taught to second graders. Students even have to categorize which country their classmates are from into the precise continent, while we only teach similar lessons in fifth grade in Taiwan. For fifth graders in the US, take Centreville Elementary School for example, students have to see commercials from different states and guess what state the commercial stands for based on their daily experience and background knowledge or common sense such as the weather, scenic spots and attractions, or idols about each state. After that warm-up activities, the teacher shows different countries around the world, and students are required to make their own clip about the country which is randomly assigned by each group. If the country is foreign to any group, then it's the time for each team member to browse through the books or internet, and discuss how to integrate those information into a humorous and educational clip. Though it may cost a lot of time to prepare, students learn from surveying and sharing ideas, and most important of all, getting to know cultures of different countries makes them competent for a global villager.



Decorations In The Campus

In addition to curriculum which makes every student a school ambassador to guide foreign visitors like us, delicate decorations around classrooms and schools set a global learning environment for students. In Centreville Elementary School, language wall shows English is just one of hundreds of languages in the world, in that encourages students to try as hard as possible to expand their views toward the world. Also, a super big poster indicates where staffs and teachers graduated from that makes students broaden their mind of learning, because they may dream of being like their adoring teachers and set a goal for themselves to achieve it. In the US, there is a daily learning goal chart in every class. Teachers ask students what they are going to learn for the day and how they can do it specifically to write their goals on the board. That's kind of self affirmation and responsible for students' own education so as to achieve the adaptable goals step by step. Furthermore, I like the slogan "Character makes a world of difference." Through this poster, teachers want students to obtain and develop positive attitude toward life philosophy, such as followings :

1 . Ride With Confidence (Switzerland)

Make a big challenge little by starting small.

2 . Win With Teamwork (U.S.A)

Win together by using others' strengths.

3 . Score With Practice (Brazil)

Get better by trying over and over, wherever you go.

4 . Run With Endurance (Kenya)

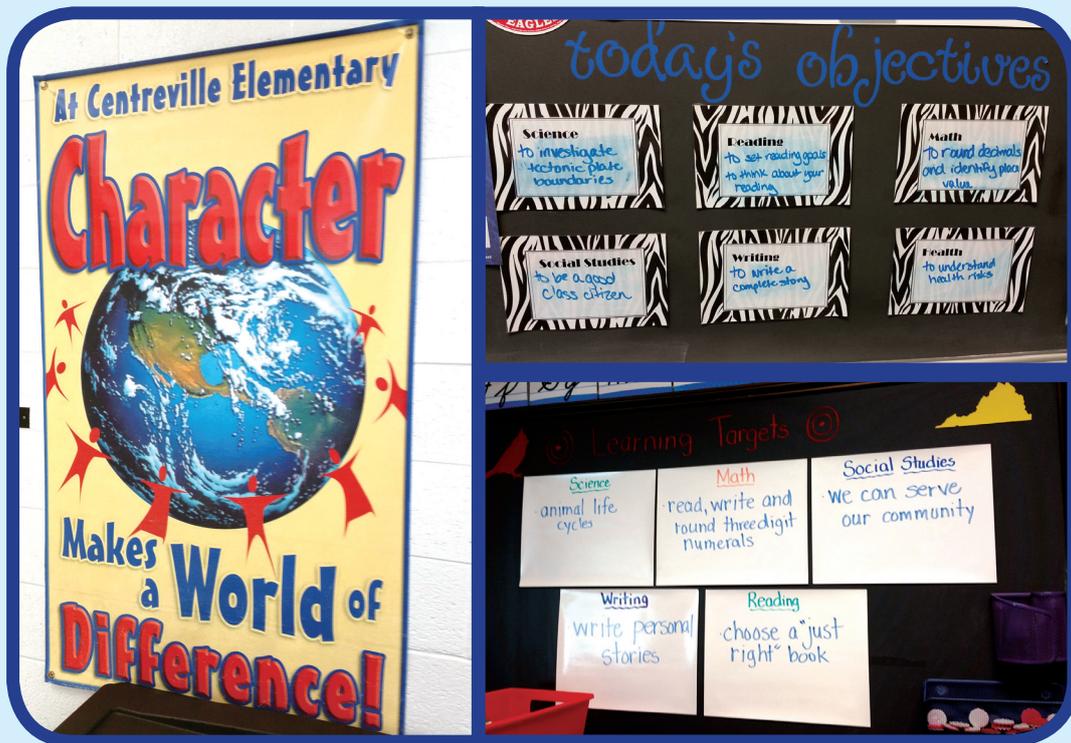
Go a little farther. Strength is on the other side of not giving up.

5 . Play With Humility (Japan)

Show a winning attitude with every victory and defeat.

6 . Live With Curiosity (Australia)

Ask big questions and explore the answers to a new world.



Surroundings

Since the education should be the most important way to build up students' global awareness, school system reflects how various the American cultures are and so are their daily surroundings and atmospheres. Lives in America, among people, language, food, clothing, and activities, are quite exotic and full of culture shocks.

Take people for example, on the way to school or any tourist resorts, especially in New York, the White, Black, and Yellow are passing by one after another as if I'm travelling by a shuttle machine. People speaks Chinese once in a while, the sound track shifts into Spanish right away, and Hindi is approachingly clear. No languages are left behind, audio guide in different scenic spots like Empire State Building, Statue of Liberty National Monument, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art etc, proves it apparently. It's easy to hear the introduction of the movie King Kong in Korean version, to be exposed to the broadcast of the chain under the statue in French, to be reminded it's time to leave the museum within 30 minutes in German and so on.

As for the activities I experienced, Double Tenth parade is one of the most common and obvious ways for a nation to be known. Oversea Chinese parade for Double Tenth National Day, and we all joined the great event this time. Everyone had two national flags in hand, one for Taiwan and the other for America in that it stands for mutual friendship between two countries. We gathered in China Town, waiting for the drums and the dragon dance, and then started our parade. While walking on the streets, we sang the national anthem and God bless the ROC patriotically. Lucky as we were, the next day we saw Spanish Americans parading on the fifth avenue in New York. There were more than 20 Spanish-speaking countries like Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, and Argentina among the grand parade. Every country performed a session, and every session consisted of the big event. Some danced Flamenco, some danced Samba, and some acted like Miss Universe. All in all, music was the great symbol of Spanish Americans and also the trigger for crazy people on the streets.



When it comes to food in America, words like fast, junk, processed flash into my mind, but Americans have an impressive appetite for good stuff, too. You may get inspired by Stateside favorites, from burgers and hot dogs to cheese cakes and doughnuts; by memorable oriental dishes such as Taiwanese spicy hot pot and Japanese healthy light and fresh sushi; by typical Mexican food from quesadillas and nachos to salsa and beans; by delightful Spanish cuisine from tortilla to paella. No matter in China Town or in Little Italy, all exotic food which served us the essence, flavor, aroma, and the culture of the country can be seen everywhere in America.



During two-week-stay in the US, culture experiencing was best of all. I could hear, speak, read and feel the culture, so the word culture is not an abstract term in the textbook anymore. Besides, by the means of exposure in an English-speaking country, I picked up lots of simple useful English words that I might not acquire easily in Taiwan. As an English teacher, I am very grateful to have this opportunity to broaden my horizons and I am very glad that I can show my students my culture experiences and use what I've learned in the USA to my English teaching. In other words, I can present and share with my students not only the language itself but also its country, people, and culture. All in all, during my stay in America, everyone I met, and everything I did would become the most unforgettable learning trip in my life. If there is any chance to visit the USA again to refresh my impression and bridge the gap between knowledge in the books and real culture, I'd like to say "Yes" doubtlessly.